

# Spendthrifts—by the Countess de Martimprey

of Kings, Princes and Titled  
Ruined or Sent Into Exile—  
Highest European Aristocracy

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lives and sorrows. Next they put on her silk stockings and shoes. Then came the new blue velvet gown, she had put on when she ran away with Rudolf. Her hair and veil were placed on her head and then the body was set in a chair while the nurses wrapped her up in her gossamer coat.

Of course, a dead body will not sit up straight, because the head will topple over. The chief of police thought of this. The Countess Larisch says, and thrust a walking stick down the dead girl's back and bound her neck to the stick with a handkerchief.

The two men supported their niece's dead body and dragged it out of the room and down the staircase to the carriage. She was placed on the back seat and the nurses sat opposite her. Count Stockau told the Countess Larisch that the following three Marie against them several times and that the close contact with the dead body during the dreadful journey almost drove them mad.

At last the carriage stopped before the gateway of an ancient monastery in an isolated part of the country. The monks, who had been asked by the count to bury the Baronesse, came out and lifted her body out of the carriage. It was then past midnight and the sky was dark and stormy.

This place was the Cistercian Abbey of Heiligenkreuz. Guards closed the gates of the monastery and surrounded the group of buildings. The nurses led into a little graveyard. The monks carried the body into an outbuilding, where an open coffin of common white wood stood ready.

There was no shroud in which to wrap the dead, and the beautiful young body was placed in the unlined burial chest. Count Stockau doubled her hat into a pillow and rested the sleeper's head upon it. He then took a gold cross which she wore around her neck and placed it between her fingers.

The monks nailed the lid upon the coffin and carried it out. After the briefest possible ceremonial the body was dropped into the grave and the earth shovelled over it.

One of the most pitiful of the many victims of the crime-stained house of Hapsburg had been laid to rest in a secret, nameless grave, but her spirit was destined to haunt them, for the memory of poor Marie Vetsera's wrongs helped to bring ruin on the imperial house.

I have read a very pathetic document, a statement by the Baronesse Helene Vetsera, mother of Baronesse Marie, concerning the last days of her daughter. In this the mother makes it clear that the poor little girl was carried away by a romantic love for the Crown Prince, who was much her senior in years and occupied a position that would have carried away the senses of almost any woman in Austria. The mother herself was overawed by the rank of the Crown Prince, but she argues that it was through no neglect of hers that her daughter met the Prince and that the frequent meetings of the lovers were only made possible by the activities of a certain highly placed countess.

To me the most moving passages are those which reveal the loving nature of this little girl, scarcely out of the school-room.

"The knightly character of the Crown Prince, with the winning enchantment of his appearance, cast a spell over the Baronesse Marie before she had been introduced to him," writes the unhappy mother.

"Her one thought was for the Crown Prince. In writing of him to her friend, Hermine, she spoke of him as the aim and object of her life, the highest and best on earth. She wrote to her friend that she could not live without him, that he was her god, her all. She sent Hermine a copy of one of the Prince's letters, wherein he entreated her to take care that they were not found out, as he could not live without her and would be insane if he could not see her. She considered herself fortunate to receive these tender letters, and told her friend that she would gladly send her one of these letters, but the Countess had taken them all away from her, saying she was going to keep them for her, so that she need not worry about them."

"Again Marie wrote her friend that she had received from the Crown Prince an iron engagement ring, on the inner side of which were the letters 'L. V. R. I. D. T.' but she did not know their meaning. In the next letter, however, she had again seen the Crown Prince, and she had explained the meaning. 'United in Love Until Death.' She was very happy. He also hung a locket on a chain about her neck wherein was a piece of linen on which was a drop of blood. This locket, she said, was the gift of the Countess, and she never, not even at night, took it off."

"Again she wrote: 'If we could live together in a little hut how happy I would be! We are always talking of it, and are very happy. But, alas, it cannot be! If I

could give him my life in order to make him happy I would gladly do it, for what is life? Oh, dear Hermine, if I must see him every day and he will take care of me, I will take care of him. I will not let him go, not even for a moment!'"

"All the pleadings of her friend, all her entreaties to think of her mother and sister, were of no avail. She begged her friend to relent and forgive her, but she could not do otherwise, for, in spite of their entreaties, her love was stronger than her will and she did not think that Hermine could be so cruel a friend as to shatter the happiness of both."

"Time and again she pleaded with her friend not to reveal her secret, and remarked that the Crown Prince had asked her to be most careful. She wrote: 'It is so hard when we see one another in the opera and to speak to one another so that mama and Hannah (her sister) will not suspect us; it would be perfectly dreadful if mama found it out.' She begged her friend not to tell her secret to anyone, because if this came to light they would both, after a few hours of happiness, die together in some unknown place." Then she added, "But no, he cannot die, he must live for his people. If you write to mama or Hannah, Hermine, it will only hasten the deed."

"She then wrote to her friend that she was having her photographs taken; two large ones for him and some small ones, one of which she would send her, and these would probably be the last pictures she would have taken in this life. At the much repeated question she would never answer, she only wrote of their boundless love and hoping that they could only belong to one another."

"The continual pleadings of her friend and confidante to break off the attachment seemed for a moment to have the desired effect, and she said she would talk with him about it. But after her conversation with him she declared emphatically that the Prince would not give her up, and she would not give him up, come what would."

"Toward the middle of January she wrote the last letter to her friend, which read: 'Dear Hermine: I have a confession to make to-day which will make you very angry. Yesterday, from 7 to 9, I was with him. We both lost our heads, and now we belong to one another body and soul. I hope on Saturday to be able to get away from the ball, and then I shall hasten to him!'" Again she cautioned her friend not to tell her mother anything about this, for if her mother found it out she would kill herself, no matter how closely she was watched."

"This letter, written in the first days of the last half of the month of January, while the friend was in Germany, has no date, but was doubtless written on the 15th of January or, at least, it was begun on this day. The 15th of January, which is marked in her diary, in which all the days are marked off, was the day she saw the Crown Prince, as this day is marked especially heavy. On this particular day she begged permission to stay home, as she said the Countess had told her that she would pay her a visit on that day. Instead of this, however, she had visited the Crown Prince, returned to the house that night very much upset and told her maid that it would have been better if she had not called on him that day, and confessed later that she must now do his bidding, no matter what he asked, as now she belonged to him alone."

"After the 15th of January there were very few meetings. On the 15th the gold cigarette case was bought at 10 shillings, with the engraving, 'January 15. Thank the Fates, and on the same day it was called for by the maid, and the receipted bill, which, by the way, was not made out in any particular name, delivered to her. This, she confided to her friend, had been given to the Crown Prince as a gift when he accompanied by the Countess, she had met him in the Prater. On the 15th of January there was another visit to the castle, on the 15th a meeting in the Prater, which was made possible through the Countess, who seemed herself by saying that she had to go to the Augustine Kirche to practice some religious music and on the way had hurt her foot."

"On the 25th of January the Baronesse, on leaving the skating rink, asked her maid to take her to a fortune teller. After



"Suddenly a full champagne bottle was hurled across the room and struck the Crown Prince in the side of the head. \* \* \* The door opened and the Baronesse Marie entered. \* \* \* A revolver was raised and she fell dead with a bullet through her head!"

fortunes to the Hapsburgs, and by this attitude of mind they helped to bring about those misfortunes. For instance, a descendant of the murdered Count Karolyi became first Premier of Hungary after the downfall of Austria, and no doubt his belief in the force of his great-grandmother's curse impelled him to action against his hereditary enemy.

I met many members of the imperial house of Hapsburg at Vienna and other places, and I always found that they had the air of facing some horrible fate. They were strange, nervous creatures. Their faces were unsymmetrical and unnatural—always the projecting Hapsburg underlip and usually some other peculiarity, such as a retreating forehead or a receding chin. Their fingers moved continually and they ran them up and down their cheeks. They drank to excess and under the influence of champagne behaved madly.

All the Hapsburgs were more or less mad. They inherited one strain of insanity from an early Spanish ancestor—"the mad Joanna"—and with the strange pride of royalty they had cultivated and increased this madness by intermarriage for centuries.

The first great misfortune that happened to the Emperor Francis Joseph, after his son's death, was the murder of his beautiful and romantic wife, the Empress Elizabeth, by an anarchist. She was entirely out of sympathy with her gross and sensual husband and spent a large part of her life away from him, travelling in disguise. I was informed by my Austrian friends that the Empress Elizabeth really introduced to her husband the actress, Kathi Schrait, with whom he spent the better part of his life in a state of domesticity. The Empress felt that her husband was infinitely beneath her in every way and thought it best to provide him with a suitable companion.

The Empress seemed more like a character of ancient legend than a modern human being. I was introduced to her while she was staying incognito at Cannes and caught a glimpse of her strange existence. She lived for the cultivation and glorification of her beauty and her body. Those who yielded a sufficiently worshipful adoration of her were admitted to her confidence.

In youth the Empress had been beloved by King Ludwig of Bavaria, the great patron of Richard Wagner. She returned his devotion, but was forced by her family to accept the powerful Emperor of Austria. Ludwig became wildly insane and ended his life by leaping with his keeper into the Lake of Starnberg. The Empress believed that his spirit returned to visit her and she spent hours in conversation with the dead King.

Alone of all the royalties I knew Empress Elizabeth fulfilled the old-fashioned American conception of these beings. The others were often extravagant and intemperate, but they only behaved as ordinary persons might do with too much power and money. She was like a figure from a Wagnerian opera. But her romantic temperament introduced a new element of mental instability into the doomed and tainted Hapsburg family.

The curse pronounced against Emperor Francis Joseph seemed to reach its climax when his nephew and heir, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated at Sarajevo in 1914. One hour after another was doomed and the old Emperor lived through it all. This time the curse of the Hapsburgs extended its dreadful influence to the whole world.

It must have been madness which drove the Austrian Emperor and his heir to pursue the policy which brought on the world war—a policy which could only end in the ruin of Austria in any event. Old

Francis Joseph died when he had seen the worst and was succeeded by a grand-nephew, Karl, the nephew of his murdered nephew.

Karl's father, Archduke Otto, was unfit to succeed to the throne and died insane after a life of the wildest excesses.

As everybody knows, the Austrian Empire was broken to fragments in the war and the Hapsburg family dethroned. Vienna, once a splendid, gay world-capital of 2,000,000 souls, is now a ruined city with its palaces falling into ruins and grass sprouting between the pavements of its boulevards.

Austrian princes and princesses whom I knew as the gayest and most reckless spendthrifts of Paris and the Riviera, owners of palaces and castles, of galleries of old masters and stables full of horses, are now reduced to absolute beggary. Some have starved to death, others have sought employment as servants or at any occupation that would keep body and soul together.

During the long period when Francis Joseph sat on the throne many members of the House of Hapsburg ran away from the family curse. One of the first of these was the Emperor's cousin, the Archduke John, who consorted with the lowest characters in Vienna and frequently became intoxicated in the society of common thieves. Finally his Imperial Highness dropped his rank and title, assumed the name "Johann Orth" and shipped as a common sailor. He sailed for South America, left his ship at Rio de Janeiro and was lost to the world forever afterward.

There were persistent rumors that the Archduke John returned to Austria about the time that Crown Prince Rudolf began his intrigue with the Baronesse Marie Vetsera. They said that he travelled between Vienna and Budapest in disguise and approached the Crown Prince in behalf of certain conspirators with the offer of the Hungarian throne. Who can say that anything was impossible in that drama of intrigue and crime?

Still another member of the Hapsburg family affected by the hereditary madness was the Crown Princess of Saxony, originally the Archduchess Louise of Austria, also a cousin of Emperor Francis Joseph. Most people remember that she ran away from the court of Dresden with her children's young French tutor. After that she eloped with some one else, steadily descending in the social scale.

A brother of Louise was the Archduke Leopold Ferdinand, to whom I have already referred as revealing some of the details of Crown Prince Rudolf's death. The Archduke Leopold Ferdinand also renounced his imperial rank, assumed the name "Leopold Woelfling" and went away to Switzerland with a handsome actress. There they joined a "back to nature" cult and lived in the woods without artificial clothing and nourished themselves on nuts, fruits and roots. Even here the curse of the Hapsburgs seemed to pursue the Archduke, for his companion grew weary of him and left him.

The amazing ill-fortune of the Hapsburg family seems to have extended its influence even to America. A few years ago there was an interesting young woman in New York known as Alma Vetsera. She believed that she was the daughter of the Crown Prince Rudolf and his unhappy sweetheart, and so did many other persons who knew her. As a child she had been sent from Europe to a Montreal convent to be educated.

From an agent who sent money for her support she learned that she was a daughter of the Crown Prince and that the old Emperor provided the money for her support. During the greater part of her life she received a large income from an un-

known source and she had no idea that this came from the Emperor.

Alma Vetsera was remarkably beautiful, and after moving to New York figured in a number of romantic episodes. Finally she went to England, where she married a young army officer, Captain Cedric Steane. They went to the great "Victory Ball" the year after the armistice. After returning home from this ball Alma Vetsera Steane received a telephone message.

She went to her bedroom, swallowed poison and died. Nobody has ever been able to find out what that telephone message was. The woman had shown great terror at times and there is every reason to believe that some secret foe drove her to her death.

Many simple people thought that the Emperor Francis Joseph was a kindly old man and sympathized with his misfortunes. His amiable appearance perhaps enabled him to keep his throne for so many years while his empire was threatening to split up and ruin was falling on his family.

But beneath that benignant exterior there was, I believe, as much evil as had ever possessed the soul of any member of the Hapsburg family. A diplomat, who had lived long at the court of Vienna, confided to me that Francis Joseph was really responsible for the tragic death of his brother, Maximilian, in Mexico.

Francis Joseph craftily consented to the wild project of making Maximilian Emperor of Mexico, because it would take him away from Austria. Maximilian was much more popular than the Emperor, both in Austria and Hungary, and there was a plan on foot to make him king of the latter country in order to satisfy the restless national aspirations of the Hungarians.

Maximilian was kept on the throne of Mexico for a time by a French army and Francis Joseph urged Napoleon III. to withdraw his army hastily, thereby throwing the unfortunate Austrian Archduke into the clutches of the Mexican leader, Juarez. It is true that the demands of the United States would also have compelled Napoleon to withdraw his army.

When Maximilian was shot in Mexico his poor young wife, Charlotte, a sister of King Leopold of Belgium, became insane and remained so for the rest of her life. Still another victim of the curse of the Hapsburgs!

Equally startling was the information whispered to me by my diplomatic friend that Francis Joseph was really responsible for King Leopold's scandalous intrigue with the Baronesse Vaughan. The Emperor, I was told, encouraged the King to marry the Baronesse, to spend enormous sums of money on her and to parade his infatuation so that it spread a quarrel with his family.

Leopold's only children, the Crown Princess Stephanie and the Princess Louise of Saxony, were conspicuous members of the Emperor Francis Joseph's court. They protested against their father's conduct with the Baronesse. He stopped their incomes and cut their names out of his will. As a result, they were thrown entirely at the mercy and charity of the Emperor Francis Joseph. The poor women were forbidden to attend the funeral of their dead mother and finally they were forced to bring lawsuits to obtain some share of their mother's property.

This was the most tawdry scandal that ever disgraced European royalty. To think that it was caused by the machinations of old Francis Joseph is startling indeed. Was he driven by the family curse to mad actions that would bring ruin on all royalty?

(To Be Continued Next Sunday)

The Baronesse Marie Vetsera as a Schoolgirl, from a Photograph Taken Only a Year Before She Met the Crown Prince.

this visit she was very much perplexed, and also very much excited all evening. She called her friend, Hermine, and told her she must know what the fortune teller had told her, as she could not forget it. She could not sleep because of it. She then said that the fortune teller with the words, "There is something I don't like," had suddenly stared at her and said that there would be a death in the family which would entangle matters greatly. It looked as if it might be a murder, and that it was very near to her and would take place in a very short time."

I do not give the rest of this statement, as the unfortunate mother had no definite knowledge how the tragedy occurred.

The Emperor Francis Joseph did not prevent any disgrace from falling upon his house when he concealed the details of his only son's death; on the contrary, he made his position infinitely worse. There is in all history no family which has been dogged by such hideous misfortunes as the Hapsburgs. I have heard that the old Emperor, in his youth, when he was suppressing the Hungarian revolution with horrible cruelty, was cursed by the Countess Karolyi for ordering the execution of her son. The Princess Bathany, of Hungary, told me about this curse which had been repeated to her by her grandmother. The Countess Karolyi said to the young Emperor:

"You shall live to see everybody you love die. Your only son shall be slain. Your wife shall be murdered. Your throne and your country shall be drowned in blood and then you, too, will die!"

It is familiar knowledge to many persons that this curse was uttered, and everybody knows, too, that it was completely fulfilled. I believe that it was not the curse which brought the misfortunes, but that the Countess Karolyi, in the extraordinary condition of mind of a mother who had just seen her son murdered, possessed abnormal mental powers, or clairvoyance. I have often seen this power exercised.

On the other hand, many persons believed that the curse directly brought this